

02-281

The Secretary of State presents his compliments to Their Excellencies and Messieurs and Mesdames the Chiefs of Mission and has the honor to inform all missions regarding the procedures for requesting Customs duty-free entry of goods into the United States.

The requirements and procedures stated in this note apply to items imported for the official use of diplomatic missions, consular offices, and designated international organizations, or for the personal use of diplomatic agents, consular officers, and administrative and technical staff of foreign missions. This note supercedes the guidance in previous diplomatic circular notes 95-55 dated March 16, 1995; 95-239 dated September 21, 1995; 97-127 dated May 27, 1997; and 98-02 dated March 26, 1998.

As a general rule, all requests for Customs duty-free entry made by foreign missions and their eligible personnel must be submitted to the Office of Foreign Missions on a typewritten form entitled "Request for Customs Clearance of Merchandise",

DS-1504. Goods may not be brought into the United States by foreign missions or their staffs through the use of any other forms or documents, with two exceptions.

1. Paper supplies and most printed matter may be admitted duty-free upon presentation to the relevant U.S. Customs Service Port Director of a letter requesting such entry. The details of this procedure are contained in pages 5-7 and 5-8 of the enclosed excerpt from the publication of the Office of Foreign Missions entitled "Guidance for Administrative Officers." However, calendars must be cleared on a DS-1504.

2. With the concurrence of the U.S. Customs Service, certain special categories of shipments can be admitted duty-free on a continuing basis. Examples are materials for use in a building project, or equipment to be used as part of a bilateral program arranged with the United States Government. Application for the admittance of shipments under such a "blanket" clearance is governed by a separate procedure, as explained on pages 5-9 and 5-10 of the enclosed excerpt from the publication referred to in the preceding "Guidance for Administrative Officers."

Permission for duty-free importation must be obtained through approval of the application form DS-1504 before a

diplomatic shipment can be released by U.S. Customs. If Customs' duties are paid to enable the release of a shipment, the Office of Foreign Missions cannot assist in obtaining a refund.

Foreign consulates located elsewhere in the United States may submit their request forms to one of the regional offices of the Office of Foreign Missions. However, foreign consulates should follow the administrative procedures issued by their embassy.

The Office of Foreign Missions strives to process all requests for duty-free entry of diplomatic shipments as quickly as possible. Nevertheless, it may take up to ten working days after an application is accepted to complete the processing and release of an approved application for duty-free entry. Two conditions must be met before the ten working day time period begins: 1. The shipment must be actually unloaded at its port of entry, and 2. a properly completed application for duty-free entry must be physically in the possession of the Office of Foreign Missions. The date on which the embassy first completes the application or the date on which the application is first delivered to the Office of Foreign Missions are not, repeat not, the dates on which the ten working day time period necessarily

begins. The Office of Foreign Missions encourages early submission of the application so that any errors or omissions on the application form can be corrected without affecting the actual release date of the shipment.

To assist foreign missions in completing form DS-1504, the rules governing its preparation are appended to this note.

Questions on any aspect of the Customs duty-free program may be directed to the Office of Foreign Missions at 202 895-3540 between the hours of 8 AM and 5 PM, Monday through Friday. After-hours questions should be directed to the Duty Officer for the Office of Foreign Missions at 202 647-7277.

Enclosures: 1. Pages 5-7 to 5-8 from the "Guidance for Administrative Officers"  
2. Pages 5-9 to 5-10 from the "Guidance for Administrative Officers"  
3. Instructions for completion of form DS-1504

Department of State,

Washington,

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